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AUTHOR Niedermeyer, Fred C.
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ABSTRACT

The instructional leadership model presented here consists of three types of sequential processes: (1) Agreeing on achievement outcomes and standards. Once the teacher and administrator have agreed on what outcomes to teach, they can then agree on some indicators as to how well and at what rate students attain these outcomes. (2) Sharing achievement information. The teacher and administrator establish a simple, convenient information channel whereby the administrator is kept informed of student accomplishments as assessment occurs. (3) Working to improve instruction in light of identified learning deficiencies. The beginning reading program tested here is consistent with the instructional leadership model discussed in that it set achievement indicators, established an information base, and modified instruction to improve achievement. The findings suggest that the instructional supervision model presented can substantially improve pupil achievement in an outcome-based, classroom-verified instructional program. (Author/IRT)

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A BASIS FOR IMPROVED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Fred C. Niedermeyer

ABSTRACT

Administrators frequently are aware of what processes or interactions are occurring in classrooms, but rarely do they have the means by which to relate these to what and how well students are learning. An instructional leadership model that requires administrators to assist teachers in defining and accomplishing instructional intents in terms of the students' achievement was developed and tested. The results strongly suggest that the model, as exemplified in the study, can substantially improve pupil attainment of important educational outcomes.

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A BASIS FOR IMPROVED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Fred C. Niedermeyer

Few will argue that school administrators should not be instructional leaders. Yet the direct exercise of such leadership in most schools today works something like this. The person charged with responsibility for supervision, often the principal or department head, makes scheduled or surprise visits to the classroom several times a year, often only once or twice. Observations made during the visits become the basis for writing one or two short statements (or completing a checklist) each year regarding the teacher's apparent professional competence (Niedermeyer & Klein, 1972). Areas evaluated may include teaching techniques, class control, personal appearance, cooperation with staff, emotional stability, etc. Interaction and discussion with the teacher regarding instruction, if any, usually comes out in the form of suggestions by the administrator. For example, "Why don't you try Program X? I hear it's terrific." Or, "Maybe we can arrange for you to observe in District Z. They're really innovative."

Such a process of supervision and evaluation, while prevalent, is of limited value. At best, teacher knowledge of the likelihood of random, "drop-in" visits to their classrooms produces only a little more preparation and effort from some teachers than if there was no classroom contact at all with the administrator. At worst, the process may sometimes be used to harass or expel competent teachers, while at the same time it may be used to condone and institutionalize teachers who promote little learning but who are punctual and cooperative, dress well, have attractive bulletin boards, and use prescribed texts.

Such supervision is limited in its effectiveness simply because it fails to zero in on the single, most important responsibility teachers and administrators have--to demonstrate that real learning is indeed taking place, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The questions of focus for maximizing instructional effectiveness should be, What do we agree is important and necessary for students to learn? and How will we know when that learning occurs?, not so much, What kind of approach is the teacher using? Does the teacher work cooperatively with the staff? Does the teacher seem to have adequate control and discipline?

What, then, is needed to increase the effectiveness of instructional leadership? Initially, instructional programs that meet three conditions are a must. Condition one is focus of instruction on clearly defined, agreed upon statements of what students will learn to do as a result of instruction. These statements, sometimes called outcomes or objectives, define in measurable ways the skills, competencies, and attitudes to be acquired by the students.[1] Condition two is use of materials and procedures that frequently assess the extent to which students have acquired the agreed upon outcomes of instruction. Condition three is availability of classroom-verified instructional materials and procedures keyed directly to the outcomes and the assessment devices. (The reasons for the third condition will be made clear, hopefully, by the end of the paper.)

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[1]For a discussion of the differences between fuzzy rhetoric and measurable outcome statements, see Niedermeyer & Moncrief, 1975a.

Most current instructional programs do not clearly define and assess their instructional intents. Neither have schools had available materials or texts that explicate student outcomes and contain corresponding assessment devices. Thus, instruction today is, for the most part, means-oriented. It focuses on activities and processes, and fails to relate these to ends, or what students are expected to learn. Consequently, instructional supervision is also very means-oriented. Without timely, outcomes-referenced achievement information, administrators scrutinize what teachers do, both in and out of the classroom, but are not able to evaluate what teachers do in light of what students learn.[2]

A Model for Instructional Leadership

The instructional leadership model presented here consists of three types of sequential processes (Sullivan & Niedermeyer, 1973): 1) Agreeing on achievement outcomes and standards. Once the teacher and administrator have agreed on what outcomes to teach, they can then agree on some indicators as to how well and at what rate students attain these outcomes. 2) Sharing achievement information. The teacher and administrator establish a simple, convenient information channel whereby the administrator is kept informed of student accomplishments as assessment occurs. 3) Working to improve instruction in light of identified

[2]Standardized test results don't fill the need here. Such tests are not normally designed to assess proficiency on stated skills, but rather to "spread" scores to facilitate comparing students to each other. Too, the items in standardized tests may or may not relate to what the teacher is teaching.

learning deficiencies. When the agreed-upon indicators do not appear for a substantial proportion of the class or groups, the administrator and teacher cooperatively analyze the instruction, hypothesize instructional changes designed to improve achievement, and then look forward to subsequent assessment to determine if indeed achievement improves.

One of the most obvious advantages of using the instructional leadership model is that the interaction between administrators and teachers is referenced to empirical evidence of student accomplishments, rather than to beliefs or opinions about what is "right" or "works." It is perfectly permissible for a teacher to use methods that are at variance with the way the administrator "used to do it" as long as assessment indicates the agreed-upon learning is taking place. If the expected learning does not occur, then perhaps the teacher will be willing to use suggestions from the administrator, and both persons can evaluate these suggestions in light of subsequent pupil assessment.

Leadership of this type is both concrete and constructive. If teacher and administrator work hard at cooperating together, and all three previously stated conditions have been met (outcomes, assessment, classroom-verified instructional materials), students will achieve and the teacher will receive appropriate recognition and reinforcement for the instructional accomplishments. When students do not achieve, administrators can really "lead" toward improvement of instruction and more impressive student accomplishments.

Applying the Model

To test the model (Niedermeyer & Fischer, 1974), an instructional supervision "package" was developed, with the help of many teachers and administrators, to accompany a nationally used instructional program, the Beginning Reading Program (BRP).[3] The resulting "BRP Instructional Improvement Kit" contained materials and procedures for performing supervisory tasks and was consistent with the instructional leadership model in that it too 1) set achievement indicators, 2) established an information base, and 3) modified instruction to improve achievement.

Set Achievement Indicators. The first thing adminstrators were to do was work with teachers to establish and agree on class achievement indicators. They were to agree what an acceptable "score" was for each student on any of the unit tests. They were also to decide what would constitute an "instructional problem." That is, while it would normally be expected that a few students would not attain the expected proficiency on each unit test, if a substantial proportion of a class or group, say a fourth or a third, consistently failed to attain the proficiency, then this was an instructional problem.

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[3]Published by Ginn and Company and used by approximately 30% of the kindergarten pupils in the country. BRP contains several characteristics required for sensible instructional leadership. First, it defines the necessary outcomes related to early reading (decoding) instruction. Second, BRP includes assessment devices for measuring pupil proficiency on the outcomes at the end of each of 10 three-week instructional units completed throughout the year. BRP was systematically developed through tryout and revision cycles in actual classrooms, and a considerable amount of user experience data is available to substantiate the program's reliability and effectiveness (Hanson & Schutz, 1975).

It was agreed that when such proficiency-referenced problems were identified, the teacher and administrator needed to examine the teacher's instructional activites and to hypothesize modifications that would subsequently cause more students to meet expected achievement accomplishments. With this particular program, it was possible to present previous-experience indicators for administrators and teachers based on the extensive data base accumulated during development of the program (Niedermeyer, 1972). Teachers and administrators were then free to either accept the experienced-based indicators or to establish their own.

Indicators were also agreed upon regarding the rate of pupil achievement. That is, full learner benefits would not be realized if teachers only taught half of the outcomes, when previous experience with the program overwhelmingly indicated it could easily be completed within the school year. When both the student proficiency and rates of progress indicators were evident, teachers could be recognized and credited. When they were not evident, then the administrator had a legitimate opportunity to lead.

Establish an Information Base. Since the administrator needs to keep informed of pupil accomplishments and rate of program completion during the year, a simple, convenient, information base needs to be established. In the BRP Instructional Improvement Kit, this need was operationalized in the form of a Class Performance Chart that the

teacher kept updated during the year. After each instructional unit, the teacher simply indicated on the chart when the unit test was given and what proportion of the class or group achieved the agreed-upon proficiency. By periodically examining the chart, the administrator and teacher quickly determined whether an instructional problem existed.[4]

Modify Instruction To Improve Achievement. This phase is the most critical yet rewarding aspect of instructional supervision. The BRP Instructional Improvement Kit contained a variety of procedures for assisting teachers in responding to less-than-anticipated achievement or rate of completion. Many of the strategies generalize to other outcomes-based instructional programs containing research-based materials for assessment and instruction:

- Administrator examines unit test records with teacher to determine if repeated instructional problem is with the same subset of pupils. May suggest grouping these pupils for additional instruction and practice. May want to explore ways to provide more practice through the use of tutors, aides, or parents.
- Administrator examines unit test records to see if instructional problem consistently reflects a particular

[4]It should be noted that class achievement here was defined in terms of the total test score, rather than subscores on each objective. This simplified the information procedure, and the supervisor could, of course, examine subscores once an instructional problem was identified. This is pointed out only because information or "instructional management" systems often present supervisors with an overwhelming amount of data--far more than is required to decide whether or not a teacher requires assistance.

outcome. Will want to question teacher as to how this outcome is taught. May want to retrain teacher with respect to this outcome.

- Administrator may want to have teacher describe how all program instruction is planned and conducted. May want to also observe instruction. May identify discrepancies between what teacher does and the research-based procedures accompanying the program. Administrator can point out discrepancies and suggest changes. (The Instructional Improvement Kit contained a form to complete when observing instruction. This form provided data with respect to the teacher's use of basic instructional principles such as providing practice appropriate to the outcomes, providing frequent practice for all pupils, and for dealing with correct and incorrect pupil responses.)

Once possible courses of action were identified, the administrator and teacher could plan appropriate instructional modifications. Subsequent unit tests then reveal the effectiveness of such modifications.

Results of Testing the Model

The notion of effective supervision, as embodied in the BRP Instructional Improvement Kit, was empirically tested with a large number of kindergarten classrooms. The tryout involved 99 kindergarten classes in 36 elementary schools from eight districts. Total participants included over 2,500 kindergarten children, representing a wide range of biosocial backgrounds and conditions.

Twenty-four of the 36 schools were randomly selected to use the Instructional Improvement Kit with the BRP. The reamining 12 schools served as BRP-only comparison schools, i.e., they were using the BRP, and administrators (principals) used whatever supervision procedures they normally would use. Of the 24 schools using the Instructional Improvement Kit, half were randomly selected to use only the part of the Kit dealing with agreement on achievement indicators and establishment of an information base. The remaining 12 schools used these parts plus the Kit's materials and procedures relating to modifying instruction to improve achievement (instructional improvement).

At the end of the school year, all classes were post-tested with a 40-item, constructed-response, oral reading test covering the four BRP reading outcomes.

The results of the testing indicated that learners in schools where the entire Instructional Improvement Kit was used achieved the BRP outcomes 20 percent higher than at BRP-only comparison schools. This difference is quite substantial and was, of course, statistically significant (Niedermeyer & Fischer, 1974). Pupils at Kit schools with indicator setting and information base, but not instructional modification, scored only six percent higher than comparison schools.

The Instructional Improvement Kit also appeared to effect a higher rate of program completion (80%) than occurred in BRP-only comparison schools (60%). Additionally, it was found that negative teacher reaction to the instructional supervision procedures was expressed at only one of the 24 Kit schools.

One of the problems with assessing the effects of programs or innovations in school settings is that it is often left unclear to what extent the programs are "real" or "fictional" (Charters & Jones, 1973). The Instructional Improvement Kit described in this study, for example, was "real" in schools where (1) teachers and principals actually met and worked through the kit materials, (2) the teachers set proficiency and pacing indicators and completed the Class Performance Chart during the year, (3) principals examined and updated charts on a regular basis, and (4) in schools using the entire Kit, principals and teachers formulated and tested instructional modifications when problems became evident. The Kit was "fictional" or only partly real in schools where any or all of these things did not occur. Too often group data representing the performance of a particular program or innovation include both real and fictional situations so as to yield lower estimates of what the real program is capable of producing. Thus, it is informative and useful to assess the extent to which thorough program implementation occurred and to examine the performance data correspondingly.

After examining various data sources to determine the extent to which administrators really implemented and followed-through with the Instructional Improvement Kit, it was found that seven of the 21 schools did not receive "full treatment." After eliminating these seven schools and looking at the achievement results for the remaining 14 schools, it was found that full implementation of the Instructional Improvement Kit resulted in a 25 percent higher achievement level than the 12 BRP-only comparison schools.

Sensible Instructional Supervision

The findings suggest that the instructional supervision model, as exemplified in the BRP Instructional Improvement Kit, can substantially improve pupil achievement in an outcomes-based, classroom-verified instructional program. It should be noted that, in this prototype application of the model, a systematically developed, empirically validated, instructional product was used--the Beginning Reading Program. The data base generated during the development of the instructional program indicated that teachers indeed could successfully effect pupil attainment of the reading outcomes. When outcomes-based instructional supervision is applied to instructional programs void of previously demonstrated empirical soundness, then it is not certain whether most teachers really can succeed, effective supervision or not. This is especially true for locally developed instruction. It's not easy to define worthwhile outcomes, assemble technically adequate assessment devices, and continually draft, test, and revise instructional materials and procedures until they are highly effective and efficient. It is a full-time job, and teachers are not full-time developers. To be fair to teachers, sensible instructional leadership, based on the premise of demonstrating pupil learning, requires effective instructional programs (Niedermeyer, 1975).

It is also important to note that administrators were provided with a product for instructional leadership, not a lecture on the topic. The Instructional Improvement Kit provided tangible materials and procedures for applying the instructional supervision model to the Beginning Reading Program. In addition to a printed guide

for the administrator, the Kit contained filmstrips, practice exercises, achievement charts, observation forms, and other materials designed to assist the administrator in training teachers and implementing the model. Good instructional supervision, like good teaching, is a difficult, complex operation, and administrators, like teachers, need and deserve all of the support educational R&D can provide.

Obviously, systematically developed, outcomes-based programs for instruction and administration are not exactly flooding the educational marketplace yet. Primarily, schools are offered traditional textbooks, where outcomes are not clearly defined or assessed, and teachers are forced to simply "push through" and "cover." The future, however, is encouraging. Complete, research-based programs such as the BRP are becoming increasingly available. Reports of other outcomes-based programs of demonstrated effectiveness, regardless of the learners' biosocial characteristics, have appeared in such curricular areas as reading and concept attainment (Hanson & Schutz, 1975), composition (Niedermeyer, 1973), and nutrition education (Niedermeyer & Moncrief, 1975b). Hopefully, schools will soon be able to choose from a variety of such programs at any level in any area, selecting the program whose outcomes best meet the needs of a particular set of learners.

A real danger is that as such programs become increasingly available, administrators will continue to "drop in" on teachers and not take advantage of these programs to sensibly relate what teachers do to what students learn. It was disappointing that in the study described here, seven of 21 elementary school principals failed to fully

carry through on outcomes-based instructional supervision, even when given the means to do so. Old habits are hard to break.

Because instructional programs have not been available that allow schools to clearly demonstrate effective teaching and to credit themselves for the learning, administrators remain very means-oriented in their role perceptions. Administrators love to describe how many "innovations" or "experimental programs" are going on in their schools. What's needed now, however, is for administrators to love to also describe these programs in terms of learner accomplishments of important instructional outcomes.

Society as a whole is becoming more sensitive to how well schools effect their primary responsibility. Parents and the community are demanding evidence of learning. Teachers deserve the means and support to demonstrate they can effect learning. As programs that meet these needs become available, they bring with them opportunities for genuine instructional responsibility and leadership.

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